DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 707 FL 007 787

AUTHOR Lavandera, Beatriz R.
TITLE Linguistic Structure in Sociolinguistic Analysis. Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, No. 31.
INSTITUTION Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY Social Science Research Council, New York, N.Y. Committee on Sociolinguistics.
PUB DATE Mar 76
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (San Francisco, California, December 29, 1975)
AVAILABLE FROM Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Descriptive Linguistics; Language Patterns; Language Research; Language Usage; *Language Variation; Negative Forms (Language); *Regional Dialects; *Sociolinguistics; *Spanish; *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS *Argentina (Buenos Aires)

ABSTRACT

This is a study of tense variation in "si"-clauses in Buenos Aires Spanish which basically consists of the substitution of the conditional for the imperfect subjunctive. The highest frequency of imperfect subjunctive shows up in +Contrary examples, while the conditional substitutes much more often in -Contrary examples. When the conditional replaces the imperfect subjunctive in +Contrary examples, the variation relates to other linguistic facts. Two examples of these are examined: (a) when the "si"-clause is negated, and (b) when the verb is the second of two conjoined verbs. The analysis shows that the use of the imperfect subjunctive in negated "si"-clauses involves a decodification process which conflicts with the routines for negation in Spanish, and that the second position for a verb in a "si"-clause is an environment where the difference between protasis and apodosis (and therefore between condition and consequence) is sometimes neutralized. That is, both factors are shown to constitute linguistic environments for which the conditional is better suited than the imperfect subjunctive to express what the speaker means, and to guarantee a more accurate reception by the hearer. (Author/CLK)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED126707

FL007787

WORKING PAPERS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Number 31

March, 1976

Linguistic Structure in Sociolinguistic Analysis

by

Beatriz R. Lavandera
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Sponsored by the Social Science Research Council
Committee on Sociolinguistics
Prepared and distributed at

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Very recently there has been in our field a revival of attempts directed at developing a general theory of syntactic change within which the rise and extension of grammatical variation can be described. In particular, the theory will have to consider those cases which consist of the addition of a new member to a grammatical system and its effects, for example given the advance of a new form into what was previously a two-member system, what is the effect on the system and why does it move where it does. I will attempt to show that although a functional explanation may be basically correct, a conclusive investigation must explore further lines. Granting the assumption that some sentences are harder to process than others, I will propose that those environments which offer some extra difficulty to production and comprehension are potential paths for the diffusion of syntactic changes.

Evidence from a corpus of 1418 sentences of Spanish elicited in the course of 100 hours of semi-directed conversation is presented as preliminary support for this hypothesis (Lavandera 1975).

An oversimplified and widely accepted description of the variation I am examining is the following:

In colloquial spoken language some speakers have a two-form system for -PAST si-clauses:

the present indicative

1. Si tengo tiempo
'if I had time'

and

the imperfect subjunctive

2. Si tuviera tiempo
'If I had time'

Other speakers also use the present indicative and t[illegible] imperfect subjunctive, but in addition they have a third form,

the conditional, which is also the most frequent tense

in the main clause or apodosis

3. Si ellos estarían en peligro
'If they were in danger'

The initial guess was that the introduction of a third member into the system was related to the vagueness with which the two-member system categorizes the continuum of degrees of probability.

By means of two features, ±CONTRARY and ±FACT I classified all the contexts in which the si-clauses occurred in the sample. +CONTRARY is computed as a feature of the context if it is clear that what is described contradicts what is actually found in the real world, which is not expected to change.

4. Si pudiese volver al tiempo atrás, me preocuparía más en eso.
'If I could turn time back, I would worry more about that.'

+FACT is assigned if the context presents the situation described, even if it is only likely, as having practially the status of a fact.

5. Si él tiene un disgusto, no viene y me dice, mira, me pasó esto y esto, nada, se lo calla, se lo traga.
'If he has a problem, he doesn't come and tell me, look, such and such happened to me, no, he keeps quiet, he keeps it to himself.'

In many of the +FACT examples, cuando 'when' could be substituted for si.

Finally, -CONTRARY, -FACT is used to characterize those clauses for which the context describes the hypothetical situation as neither the opposite of the real one, nor as predictable as fact. That is, -CONTRARY, -FACT is equal to the intersection of -CONTRARY and -FACT.

6. Si yo tengo que ir a vivir al campo, iría, por seguirlo y todo.
'If I have to live in the country, I'd go, to follow him and all that.'

7. Me sentiría muy contento si eso lo cumpliera.
'I'd feel very happy if I did that.'

8. Si tendría que hacer una cosa como esa, me gustaría.
'If I had to do something like that, I'd like it.'

It might be argued that one feature would be enough, so long as one envisages +CONTRARY and +FACT as the opposite values of a single feature ±REAL. But I want to emphasize that a context which is -CONTRARY is not necessarily +FACT. It may be either -CONTRARY, +FACT or -CONTRARY, -FACT. Both +CONTRARY and +FACT characterize "marked" situations which are at either extreme of the continuum of degrees of probability. A whole range of situations in the middle are neither +CONTRARY, nor +FACT.

I uncovered the following correlations which can be drawn from Table 1:

TABLE 1.

	Present Indicative	Imperfect Subjunctive	Conditional
+FACT	56	0	0
+CONTRARY	7	76	31
-CONTRARY -FACT	37	24	69

N=

1) the present indicative is more frequent in +FACT contexts;

2) the imperfect subjunctive is more frequent in +CONTRARY contexts;

3) the conditional is more frequent in -CONTRARY, -FACT contexts.

It is not radical to propose that if a form occurs with a very high frequency in contexts which share some specific semantic feature, the form itself may be expected to end up incorporating that feature in its meaning.

It would thus seem that since the frequency of occurrence of the imperfect subjunctive in si-clauses is highest in "unreal" contexts, it can no longer express "just probable" hypotheses accurately, and results at best

ambiguous between plus and minus CONTRARY. When the speaker clearly wants to present a -CONTRARY situation, he may do so by avoiding the imperfect subjunctive and employing the conditional instead. One might claim then that the conditional is used to disambiguate the feature ± CONTRARY.

However, while this functional motivation of avoiding vagueness accounts for the fact that 67% of the uses of the newer variant serve to disambiguate the contexts in which it occurs, 33% of the examples cannot be explained in this way. In all of these there are other signals which redundantly characterize the contexts as +CONTRARY. These cases cannot be analyzed as uses of the conditional aimed at avoiding the +CONTRARY connotation and they would appear to contradict the "vagueness" hypothesis. However, it is not necessary to expect every phenomenon to have just one cause in a one-to-one relationship. In this case we have that the conditional is being used to lend greater precision to some -CONTRARY si-clauses and we may have to look for further evidence to explain the fact that its distribution gradually seems to be extending to +CONTRARY contexts.

When I examined the clauses where the conditional is used in +CONTRARY contexts, I found the following facts:

a) within +CONTRARY contexts, negated si-clauses are more favorable to the conditional than non-negated si-clauses.

9. Si yo no tendría así un placer como lo tengo ahora mismo me largaría a trabajar.
'If I didn't have something to give me pleasure, as I do have, I would get to work right away.'

10. Si no tendría este hogar, faltaría algo.
'If I didn't have this home, there'd be something missing.'

b) all examples of conditional in +CONTRARY contexts which are not in negated si-clauses are instances of a second verb within the si-clause.

11. Si yo quebrara justamente esas limitaciones que me he puesto y transgrediría eso y todas las demás cosas, indudablemente me sentiría muy infeliz.
'If I broke these rules I have set myself and I didn't keep to that and all the other things, undoubtedly I'd feel very unhappy.'

This leads us to explore the theoretical question raised at the beginning concerning the paths a syntactic change may take to advance.

I said I would show that the syntactic change I will be discussing arose and advances in those environments, among others, which convey information difficult to process. In particular, I would like to suggest that since the imperfect subjunctive is undergoing a process in which it is being replaced by different tenses in different environments, its resistance to substitution will be weaker in cognitively complex environments. I will explain why I consider +CONTRARY negated si-clauses and some si-clauses with two conjoined verbs to be examples of these kinds of environments.

Let us first examine the negated examples. When Jespersen discusses the fact that for Indo European languages past tenses are used in non-past contexts to express unreality, he points out that "something is in all these cases denied with regard to the present time" (1924: 265. Emphasis added).

Andrés Bello, when he studies the Spanish subjunctive, also mentions "the sense of indirect or implicit negation which conditional or optative sentences often take in Spanish" (1847: 226. Emphasis added).

Fillmore analyzes the English sentence "Even if he were here, she would be having a good time" as "factored" into three suppositions, one of them being "He is not here."

It is clear that in all of the examples that I classified as +CONTRARY there is by definition an implied negation. It can be shown that the syntactic negation of that implied negation is difficult to process in Spanish

because it requires a strategy different from the general Spanish negation routines.

Let us remember that Spanish is a negative concord language. Thus

12. No viene nadie
literally
'Nobody is not coming.'

does not convey the affirmative message that somebody is coming, but its translation is

'Nobody is coming.'

Thus, two negations still make a negative statement.

On the other hand, in negated +CONTRARY si-clauses the two negations, i.e., the syntactic negation and the implied negation result in an affirmation.

Let me discuss this with an example. In a sentence such as

13a. Si yo tuviera un hijo, sería feliz.
'If I had a child, I'd be happy.'

tuviera un hijo implies, or presupposes, or makes it possible for the hearer to understand, I won't try to establish the status of this part of the information in the analysis, that

13b. No tengo un hijo.
'I don't have a child.'

But then

14a. Si yo no tuviera un hijo.
'If I didn't have a child.'

is understood as

14b. No (no tengo) un hijo.
'Not I don't have a child.'

which goes to

14c. Tengo un hijo.

This is what I meant by saying that the explicit negation of the implied negation results in an affirmation. But to operate on two negations to end up affirming something is a routine contrary to those used in a negative concord language and therefore constitutes a hurdle to decodification.

Independent evidence of this difficulty was supplied by the results of a formal test applied at the end of the interview which required, among other things, the repetition and paraphrase of negated and non-negated si-clauses. The number of correct responses was lowest when the explicit negation occurred in +CONTRARY contexts.

The preceding considerations are also consistent with the data on production of these clauses shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2.
Relative Percentages of Imperfect Subjunctive (IMPF) vs. Conditional (COND) for Each Value of ± NEGATED within both +CONTRARY and -CONTRARY. N=183.

	+CONTRARY		-CONTRARY	
	+NEGATED	-NEGATED	+NEGATED	-NEGATED
(IMPF)	72	90	100	49
(COND)	28	10	0	51
N=	25	88	5	65

This Table shows that the +CONTRARY contexts, i.e., those which proved to be the least favorable to the substitution of the conditional in a first analysis do however allow it with a higher frequency if the si-clause is negated.

But not all the examples of conditional occurring in +CONTRARY contexts are cases of negated si-clauses. We are left with 9 occurrences of the conditional which are +CONTRARY and are not negated, i.e., which have so far not been accounted for.

The first thing I noticed is that all these examples share a particular environment: all are instances of the second verb of a si-clause with an imperfect subjunctive as the first verb. I intend to show that this fact can be convincingly cleared up by taking into account both the type of statements made in all these clauses and the order of the clauses.

Take for instance the standard sentence:

15a. Si tuviera dinero y pudiera comprar una casa, sería muy feliz.
'If I had money and I could buy a house, I'd be very happy.'

Compare this with its paraphrase, a perfectly grammatical and very frequent construction with the two conjoined verbs in the apodosis:

15b. Si tuviera dinero, podría comprar una casa y sería muy feliz.
'If I had money, I could buy a house and I'd be very happy.'

The real situation described is the same in both cases (that is why I say both sentences are paraphrases of each other) but in 15a) poder comprar una casa 'to be able to buy a house' is presented as a condition of ser muy feliz 'to be very happy', while in 15b) it is presented as a consequence of tener dinero 'to have money.'

In addition, it is the position of the conjunction y 'and' which disambiguates the syntactic status of the second clause within the sentence. It may be an apodosis because it comes after the verb of the si-clause and may be interpreted as the consequence of the si-clause, and it may be a si-clause or protasis because it comes before the apodosis sería feliz and may be interpreted as a condition for it.

The sentence actually recorded, which is one of the examples of conditional in si-clauses is:

15c. Si yo tuviera dinero y podría comprar una casa, sería feliz.
'If I had money and could buy a house, I would be happy.'

The choice of the tense requires a previous step to disambiguate the status of the second verb: is it a si-clause or is it an apodosis, and does it refer to a condition or to a consequence? In addition, since the conditional is the tense characteristic of the apodosis, both the non-resolution of the disambiguation and an analysis by the speaker of the si-clause as a main clause will favor the substitution of the conditional.

This reasoning can be applied to all the registered cases of si V(IMPF) y V(COND), Apodosis.

One more example:

16. Si se hiciera una positiva reforma agraria y cada cuadradito de campo tendría posibilidad de ser trabajado, no habría migración porque no habría motivo.
'If there were a positive agrarian reform and every little plot of land had a chance to be tilled, there'd be no migration because there'd be no reason for it.'

Cada cuadradito de campo tendría posibilidad de ser trabajado 'every little plot of land had a chance to be tilled' can be interpreted both as a consequence of hacer una reforma agraria 'if there were a positive agrarian reform' and a further cause for no habría migración 'there'd be no migration.' Also, its position in the sentence corresponds just as much to the apodosis of si se hiciera 'if there were' as to the protasis of no habría 'there would be no migration.'

On the other hand, please notice that none of these examples of conditional in the second conjoined verb occurs when it is clear that the actions listed in the si-clause in no way imply one another, but are all straightforward conditions, such as for example:

17. Si se fuera mi hija y me llamara y me dijera que me necesita, que quiere que yo le ayude, yo iría perfectamente.
'If my daughter went away and called me and said that she needs me, that she wants me to help her, I would go.'

To recapiulate, I find that in Buenos Aires Spanish the conditional is replacing the imperfect subjunctive in -CONTRARY contexts, thus allowing an overt distinction to be made between "unreal" and "just probable" situations. This leads to the acceptance of the hypothesis of "avoidance of ambiguity." However, I also find the conditional used in some +CONTRARY contexts which cannot be explained in this way. I have identified two favorable environments within +CONTRARY both of which add some special burden to the processing of the sentence:

a) in negated clauses, the use of an unusual routine to operate on two negations;

b) in the second verb of the si-clause, a step to disambiguate the status of the verb between being either the verb of a condition or that of a consequence, i.e., between a si-clause verb and a main clause verb.

My analysis of this case of addition of a new member to a system sees it then as arising from "avoidance of vagueness," and implemented by those environments which offer some extra complexity in processing. This hypothesis of a correlation between complexity of processing and proclivity to vary will have to be further tested in other situations of syntactic variation.

References

Bello, A.: Gramática de la lengua castellana 5th ed. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sopena, 1958. First published 1847.

Jespersen, O.: The philosophy of Grammar. New York: Norton, 1965. First published 1924.

Lavandera, B.: Linguistic structure and sociolinguistic conditioning in the use of verbal tenses in si-clauses (Buenos Aires Spanish). Unpublished. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms 1975.